

BLACKS
AND
PHYSICAL PLANNING

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In the last twenty years the situation of the American urban settlement has become the object of concern, complaint, discussion, analysis and proposals for reform; also a big amount of literature has been written on the argument trying to describe the transformation of the physical structure of American towns and to point out all the shortcomings of urban settlements in this time of radical change. The debate has been developing mostly inside of the field of the planning discipline, and the points discussed have been analyzed through a predominantly physical approach.

But more recently a deep preoccupation has originated regarding the social and human resource problems--social discrimination, racial segregation, and a failure to provide for the fulfillment of the potential of a big quantity of the population. Since all these problems have their deepest and broadest expression in the urban environment of the American town (the urban American society), the totality of its aspects and implications has become more and more the object of criticism. But what may appear as a kind of crisis of the urban life is not the direct result of the lack of the physical organization of the city environment. Vice versa, both of them point out how a nation, which is the richest of the world, did not succeed up until now in resolving not only the minor problems of the organization of the physical environment, but all those problems such as equity of rights and choices that a democratic society should have resolved long ago.

The social discontent or the "worrying" phenomena observable in the American scene are consequently the reaction to the unfulfilled political promises and the refusal of national ideals widely accepted only ten years ago. When, as in this case, the fractures of a society are too deep and broad to be cured through a bettering of the physical environmental conditions, urban planning can do very little.

If the reasons of grievances are deeply rooted in the history of a nation, if slavery and racial segregation and discrimination belong to a tradition of hundreds of years, it is unlikely that additional open spaces or a more efficient transit system can introduce substantial modifications in a situation of social tensions, where the basic demands are for basic necessities such as employment and economic opportunities, equity of rights and abolishment of discrimination practices. Urban planning can only focus upon--through its analyzing and advising--the physical goals that must be achieved to provide a decent environment to live in, and to point out the political course of action that should be carried out for their achievement. But it cannot guarantee that the political decisions will accomplish and follow up on the technical indications that planners give, and it does not have real instruments to deal with the socially and politically excluded groups and it cannot provide any modification in the class structure of the American society.

It is impossible not to agree or recognize that the crisis of the American society is broad, and is a deeply serious concern. This concern has been translated into an increasing number of governmental and voluntary efforts to cope with the problems. Projects in health, education, law enforcement, employment, recreation and welfare have proliferated but the result has not been very successful. Why? The effort has been short of the real necessity, and so the increase of expenditure and expansion of bureaucracy did not coincide with an improvement in the conditions of society, or with the decreasing of the social tensions

In this situation there is a problem that more than anything else seems to characterize what is possible to call the crisis of the American cities, and this is the crisis of the race relations. Not only is the American society moving toward two different communities--one white with particular economical features and privileges, and the other black, more or less in a colonial situation of dependence, but the problems of the relations in these two groups is bound to get steadily worse.

Since 1963, for instance, episodes of racial disorders have taken place in the urban centers of the United States, such as Birmingham, Cambridge, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia; in Watts in 1965, 34 people were killed in only 36 hours of rioting; in an explosion of race eagerness that has been defined as the worst

since the Detroit riots of 1943. In 1966, 33 racial disorders and riots were reported, in 75 of which 83 deaths have been calculated.

Why? Under these physically violent explosions expressing grievances which were violently repressed is it possible to discover a worrying reality where the riots are nothing else than an emotional explosion against the American society and its injustices. There are three basic elements that characterize the situation of the American blacks in the American environment, and toward which the black protest is directed:

Pervasive discrimination and segregation. The first is surely the continuing exclusion of great numbers of Negroes from the benefits of economic progress through discrimination in employment, education, and their enforced confinement in segregated housing and schools. The corrosive and degrading effects of this condition and the attitudes that underlie it are the source of the deepest bitterness and at the center of the problem of racial disorder.

Black migration and white exodus. The second is the massive and growing concentration of impoverished Negroes in our major cities resulting from Negro migration from the rural South, rapid population growth and the continuing movement of the white middle-class to the suburbs. The consequence is a greatly increased burden on the already depleted resources of cities, creating a growing crisis of deteriorating facilities and services and unmet human needs.

Black Ghettos. Third, in the teeming racial ghettos, segregation and poverty have intersected to destroy opportunity and hope and to enforce failure. The ghettos too often "mean" men and women without jobs, families without men, and schools where children are processed instead of educated, until they return to the street--to crime, to narcotics, to dependency on welfare, and to bitterness, and resentment against society in general and white society in particular.

These three forces have converged on the inner city in recent years and on the people who inhabit it. At the same time, most whites outside the ghetto have prospered to a degree unparalleled in the history of civilization. Through television--the universal appliance in the ghetto--and the other media of mass communications, this affluence has been endlessly flaunted before the eyes of the Negro poor and the jobless ghetto youth.

As Americans, most Negro citizens carry within themselves two basic aspirations of our society. They seek to share in both the material resources of our system and its intangible benefits--dignity, respect and acceptance. Outside the ghetto many have succeeded in achieving a decent standard of living, and in developing the inner resources which give life meaning and direction. Within the ghetto, however, it is rare that either aspiration is achieved.

Statistics and data point out that the economic gap is dividing the white and black community. No one can avoid admitting what Siberman has said, "The United States--all of it, North as well as South, West as well as East, are racist in a sense and in a degree that everybody refused so far to admit, much less face."¹ Facts prove it.

The real income, the relative status income, of Negroes has gone down during a period when the race was supposed to have been making what candidates for elective offices call the most dramatic progress of any oppressed group at any period of human history. Actually, in many ways the Negro's situation is deteriorating. They have been left out of the prosperity and social progress of the nation as a whole, and they are a permanent economic proletariat.

In 1966, 29.7 million persons in the United States--15.3 % of the nations population--were with incomes below "the poverty level" as defined by the Social Security Administration. Of these, 20.3 million were white (68.3 %) and 9.3 million were non-white (31.7%). Thus, 11.9 % of the nation's whites and 40.6 % of its non-whites were under the Social Security definition. The present incomes of Negroes still remain far below those of whites, since, in 1966 Negro median family income was 58% of the white median, and Negro family income is not keeping pace with white family income growth: in constant 1965 dollars median non-white income in 1947 was \$2,174 lower than median white income and by

1966 the gap had grown to 3,036. In 1966 28 percent of all the Negro families received incomes of 7,000 dollars or more compared with 55 percent of white families. According to statistics, about two-thirds of the lowest income groups are making insignificant gains despite continued general prosperity. Recent special census in the Los Angeles area and Cleveland indicate that the incomes of persons living in the worst slum area have not risen at all during this period and that unemployment rates have declined only slightly.

It is a reality that the black community is becoming more and more depressed. Unemployment rates among Negroes have declined from a post war 12.6 percent in 1958 to only 8.2 percent in 1967, while the total unemployment declined from 6.8 in 1958 to 3.8 in 1967. Thus, unemployment rates for Negroes are still more than double those for whites, and have been continuously above the 6.0 percent "recession level" widely regarded as a sign of economic recession. According to the Commission on Civil Disorders in 1967, approximately 3.0 million persons were unemployed during an average week, of whom about 638,000 or 21 percent were non-whites.²

Unemployment rates among Negroes are much higher among teenagers. In 1948 the jobless rate of non-white males between the ages of fourteen and nineteen was 7.6 percent. In 1965, the percentage of unemployment in this age group was 22.5 percent. The corresponding figures for unemployed white male teenagers was 8.3 percent in 1948 and 11.8 in 1965.

In the ten-year period from 1955 to 1965, total employment for youth between the ages of fourteen and nineteen increased from 2,642,000 to 3,612,000. Non-white youths got only 36,000 of those

370,000 new jobs. As for adults, the ratio of non-white to white adult unemployment has remained double.

During the first nine months of 1967, the unemployment rate among non-white teenagers was 26.5 percent. For whites it was 10.6 percent. About 219,000 non-white teenagers were unemployed and about 58,300 were still in school but were actively looking for a job.

But even more important than unemployment is the related problem of the undesirable nature of many jobs of the Negroes. Negro workers are concentrated in the lowest skilled and lowest paid occupations. These jobs often involve substandard wages, great instability and uncertainty of tenure, no chance for meaningful advancement, and unpleasant or exhausting duties. Negro men in particular are more than twice as likely as whites to be in unskilled or service jobs which pay far less than most. But the biggest problem in the job situation of the black population is that many of the jobs now held by Negroes in the unskilled occupations are deadend jobs, due to disappear during the next decade, while employment in those industries and occupations requiring considerable education and training is expected to increase. As the pressure of unemployed white workers in the few expanding areas of unskilled jobs grows, the ability of the ghetto residents to hold on to such jobs becomes doubtful. The solution lies in finding jobs for the unemployed and in raising the social and economic status of the entire community.

"By far the greatest growth in employment in New York City is expected in professional, technical and similar occupations - some 75,000 to 80,000 jobs by the end of the present decade. Of the 3 percent of Harlem residents in this group, the major portion are in the lower paying professions: clergymen, teachers, musicians, social welfare, and recreation workers.

A substantial increase of 40 percent in the number of managers, officials, and proprietors is expected in business and government, but the Negroes have made few advances here. This will be offset by declines expected in retail business, where the trend toward bigness will result in fewer small store proprietors, another prophecy with grim implications for Negroes since the only business where Negro ownership exists in number is small stores. The number of clerical positions is due to grow in New York by 35,000 to 40,000 jobs. Approximately 14 percent of the residents of Harlem have such jobs, but most of them are in the lower paying positions. Electronic data processing systems will soon replace many clerks in routine and repetitive jobs such as sorting, filing, and the operation of small machines - the kind of jobs Negroes have - while workers in jobs requiring contact with the public, such as claim clerks and bill collectors - usually white - will be most affected by office automation. The number of sales workers will decline as self services increase, and here too, Negroes who have been successfully employed will lose out.

Jobs for skilled workers are due to grow in New York state by 28,000 yearly. Building trades craftsmen will be particularly in demand, but the restriction to apprenticeship training programs in the building trades industry have kept Negroes from these jobs. Thirty-eight percent of the Negro workers living in Harlem have such jobs now. If present unemployment patterns persist, Negro and white workers who might ordinarily qualify for semi-skilled jobs will undoubtedly be pushed into the unskilled labor force or become unemployed in the face of increasing competition with those who are better trained. Negro unemployment will rise as the unskilled labor supply exceeds the demand. The only jobs that will increase and in which Negroes now dominate, are jobs as servants, waiters, and cooks. The traditional service jobs which have added to the Negro's sense of inferiority. But as the requirements for skilled jobs grow stiffer and as semi-skilled jobs decline, Negroes will face strong competition from the whites to hold on to these marginal jobs." 3

Even given similar employment, Negro workers with the same education as white workers are paid less. The differentiations are so large and so intense at all educational levels that they clearly reflect the pattern of discrimination which characterize hiring and promotion practice in many segments of the economy. For example, in 1966 among persons who had completed high school the median income of Negroes was always 73 percent that of whites, even among persons with eighth-grade education. A non-white male college graduate in

1960 was 5.020, actually \$110 less than the earnings of white males with only three years of high school education.

The different features of the economical situation between the white and the black communities are the reasons for all the alarming phenomena that statistics point out as the basic characters of the pathology of the ghetto and of its peculiar social structure. But the elimination of all the undesirable social traits observable in the ghettos (delinquency, crime, etc.) would require a radical change in the American political scene, to be able to fight poverty and segregation, that seem to have been accepted as stable institutions. Politically, this means a new course of action capable of eliminating the conditions that created the ghetto and that tend to perpetuate it, but only a very long range action is likely to provide an effective result.

All the same, action must be undertaken immediately, and if we analyze the general urban situation of the United States, it is recognizable that it is impossible to wait any longer.

The Negro population of the cities is growing significantly faster than the white population. From 1940 to 1960 the white population rose 34.0 percent, but the Negro population rose 46.6. From 1960 to 1966 the white population grew 7.4 percent, almost twice as much. Consequently, the proportion of Negroes in total population has risen from 10.0 percent in 1960 and 11.1 percent in 1966. By this year the total Negro population has increased to 21.5 million and two significant geographic shifts had taken place. The proportion of Negroes living in the South had dropped to 55 percent and about 69 percent of whites. Statistically, the Negro population

in America has become more urbanized and more metropolitan than the white population. For example, from 1950 to 1960 the ten largest cities in the United States had a total Negro population increase of 1.8 million, while the white population there declined 1.5 million. The black immigrants, mostly poor, tend to concentrate in the core of the biggest American cities where obsolete residences have been left by the white middle classes on their flight to the suburbs. Their presence here, their demographic increase, and their concentration is one of the major reasons of concern for the political authorities.

Who can do a physical plan of development or of redevelopment in this situation? Planners can propose a physical elimination of the ghetto, its renewal, or the bettering of its physical conditions, but cannot fight or eliminate the economical background or the racial attitudes that contribute to its formation. Urban planning is thus likely to try to eliminate the inevitable result of a complicated social process, without any chance of having an impact on the structural reasons that organized the ghetto and that are likely to propose it in the future.

This does not mean that nothing has to be done, but it is only a way to understand the limits implicit in physical plans, and the limited goals that can be reached through them. Through more efficient urban planning it would be possible, however, to get better housing or better facilities, and even if the studies on the social effects of poor housing has produced findings less dramatic than one would expect, those remain basic issues. Wilkner and Walkley point out, for instance, that:

"For all the housing improvement many other circumstances that would expect to affect the way of life remained substantially the same. There were still families of the lowest end of the economic scale. Practical family situations remained materially unimproved; in one-third of the families there were no husbands, and one third were on public welfare. Housing alone does not lead to sound psychological adjustment, for to build up houses and to spruce up the old, is not to abolish the multiple pathology of the slums."⁴

Still, at the very least, good housing improves health and helps to generate a restless eagerness for change, if not in the adult generation then in their children. We should not forget that everyone has a right to have decent housing.

Nevertheless, these limited goals have not been achieved even if the Housing Act of 1949 made an explicit comment establishing as a national goal, "a decent home and suitable environment for every American family".

The report of the National Advisory Committee on Civil Disorders points out that in 20 cities studied after the riots, housing grievances were found in almost all of them and appeared to be one of the most serious complaints in a majority of them. These included inadequate enforcement of building and safety codes, discrimination in sales, as well as rentals, and overcrowding.

Today, after more than three decades of fragmented and grossly under funded federal housing programs, decent housing remains a chronic problem for the disadvantaged urban household. Fifty-six percent of the country's non-white families live in the central cities today and of these nearly two-thirds live in neighborhoods marked by substandard housing and general urban blight. For these citizens, condemned by segregation and poverty, the goal is as distant as ever. During the decades of the 1950's when most of the number of Negroes

were migrating to the cities, only four million of the new 16.8 million new housing units constructed throughout the nation were built in the central cities. These additions were counterbalanced by the loss of 1.5 million city units through demolitions and other means. The result was that the number of non-whites living in substandard housing increased from 1.4 to 1.8. Statistics available for the period since 1960 indicate that the trend is continuing.

The basic reason many Negroes are compelled to live in inadequate housing is the failure of the private market to produce decent housing at rentals they can afford to pay. Even if a new income policy is organized and oriented toward a redistribution of income, it is obvious that in the foreseeable future there will continue to be a gap between the income of many Americans and the price of decent housing produced by normal market mechanism.

To date, federal building programs have been able to do comparatively little to provide housing for the disadvantaged. In the 31 year history of subsidized federal housing, only about 800,000 units have been constructed with recent production averaging only about 50,000 units a year. By comparison, over a period only three years longer, FHA insurance guarantees have made possible the construction of over ten million middle and upper income units.

Federal programs also have done little to prevent the growth of racially segregated suburbs around our cities, and if things go on this way, those programs will continue to concentrate the most impoverished and dependent segments of the population into the central city ghettos, where there is already a critical gap between the needs of the population and the public resources to deal with them. This

this can only continue to compound the conditions of failure and hopelessness which lead to crime, civil disorder and social disorganization.

In 1967 the Commission on Civil Disorders proposed a program in ten areas to illustrate the basic strategies needed in the housing sector.

- Provision of 600,000 low and moderate-income housing units next year, and 6 million units over the next five years.
- An expanded and modified below-market interest rate program.
- An expanded and modified rent supplement program, and an ownership supplement program.
- Federal write-down of interest rates on loans to private builders.
- An expanded and more diversified public housing program.
- An expanded Model Cities Program.
- A reoriented and expanded urban renewal program.
- Reform of obsolete building codes.
- Enactment of a national, comprehensive and enforceable open-occupancy law.
- Reorientation of federal housing programs to place more low and moderate-income housing outside of ghetto areas.
- The supply of housing suitable for low-income families should be expanded.

All the same, the present American housing policy seems to be very obscure, and the new Nixon administration does not provide any positive indication for the future. Robert Wood, former Housing Under Secretary declared that, "there is a disturbing national tendency to replace goals instead of fulfilling them; in this instance, to shift emphasis in 1970 from priorities of urban development established only two years ago to a new area focusing on the

national environment" and that "the 1949 housing act has failed for 20 years to provide the housing we guaranteed in an acceptable environment, setting aside our housing failures of the past."

In 1968 the declaration of policy of Housing and Urban Development Act stated:

Sec. 2: "The Congress affirms the national goal as set forth in Section 2 of the Housing Act of 1949, of a decent living environment for every American family. The Congress finds that this goal has not been fully realized for many of the Nation's lower income families, that this is a matter of grave national concern, that there exists lower income families, and that there exists in the public and private sectors of the economy the resources and capabilities necessary for the full realization of this goal. The Congress declares that in the administration of those housing programs authorized by this Act which are designed to assist and provide for low income families who could not otherwise decently house themselves, and of other government programs designed to assist in the provision of housing for such families, the highest priority and emphasis should be given to meeting the housing needs of those families for which the national goals have not become a reality. Also, in the carrying out of such programs there should be the fullest practicable utilization of the resources and capabilities of private enterprise and of individual self-help techniques."

In spite of formal and official declarations, new political events seem to contradict former goals and actions. In particular, the goal of a decent house for everyone which seem, in reality, to have reached only a few select groups of the population. But this is not new. The Federal Housing policies in the United States have always been developed in response to specific critical situations which may or may not have been directly related to housing.

The earliest federal legislation directly associated with housing - the Owners Loan Acts of 1933 - were enacted to protect both mortgagors and mortgagees from losing their interest in real property because of the depression. The National Housing Act of

1934, while ostensibly designed to promote home-ownership through establishment of the Federal Housing Administration, in reality was developed because of the general collapse of economic activity in the 1930's and the assumption that stimulation of the residential construction industry would stimulate the entire economy. The motivation for the inauguration of housing programs in the 1930's was not intended to produce a cohesive housing policy for the nation but rather to use housing as a means of aiding in the elimination of the Depression. Even in the late 1940's when it was evident that there was not going to be a major unemployment of resources in the economy, housing programs were developed in response to broad general objectives rather than in terms of meeting specific housing and land use needs.

Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 whereby federal assistance was provided to local communities for the redevelopment of blighted areas, was enacted after much debate with bipartisan support, and was as much in response to the declared need for protecting business activity and land values in central metropolitan areas as it was to the argument that new and better environments for central city dwellers should be created. In relation to the magnitude and the general problems they were designed to solve, which of these housing programs has been most successful? Analysis indicates that the legislation of the 1930's neither markedly influenced the course of general economic conditions in that period nor did it materially affect the housing conditions of the American people (from 1934 to 1940 only 332,850 units were constructed under F.H.A. insured programs). Clearly, the housing problems, to say nothing of the

economic problems of the Depression, were immense in scope and yet housing legislation of that period was essentially ineffective both in terms of improving housing conditions and in working toward alleviating the Depression. But there is another point that must be remembered in the United States, it appears that those programs which basically have been related to existing institutions within the economy and have operated within the framework of the price system have been most successful.

These conditions are both met by F.H.A. insured loan programs which, in effect, insures the loans of existing lenders, life insurance companies, commercial banks and savings and loan associations. In addition, it modifies but does not displace the market. It, in effect, operated to increase the demand for mortgage loans by bringing about lower interest rates, longer terms, and higher ratio of loans to lending values; at the same time it increased the supply of funds in the market by removing some of the risk of lending. Through the years the program has been altered and changed, but its major objective has been the provision of more effective market structures within which existing lenders operate. The net results have been that lenders - particularly the commercial banks and mortgage lenders - have constantly supported the program.

But the program for providing houses for low income groups has had exactly the opposite experience. While the most important element of any housing policy is a program for low cost housing, there has never been an effective low income housing program in the nation. Thus, it is possible to conclude that legislation in the United States to improve housing conditions in the past three decades has

been successful primarily when it has operated in conjunction with elements within society - e.g., commercial banks, life insurance companies, etc. - and when it has been designed to supplement the operation of the free market price system. All other legislation, such as that concerning public housing, urban redevelopment, open space acquisition, has not succeeded in achieving real progressive goals, even if the dimension of the demand of "below-market people" has increased through the years and housing remains a deep unsolved problem of the American situation.

To summarize, there are two major problems that the American city has to face at present: problems of growth and of changes of the internal structure on the one hand, and the crisis of the race relations on the other. They require two different sets of measures determining present trends, and whether (how much) the situations are being corrected. Concerning the physical situation of the city, these basic measurements are required:

- 1) a policy toward different national population distribution capable of slowing down the immigration pressures in the metropolitan areas;
- 2) the creation of overall metropolitan governments for the metropolis;
- 3) public ownership of part of the land that is to be developed;
- 4) tax revenues sufficient to enable the metropolitan government to acquire land and carry out the public works required for its development;
- 5) national housing policy that would eliminate segregation by providing people at all levels of income with freedom of choice regarding the location of their dwelling;
- 6) and in the short range, new fiscal vitality to local government and a new emphasis on the importance of the state to aid the cities.

Concerning the problems of racial segregation and discrimination in American society, it would be necessary to direct a new national drive toward a more effective democratic structure of the entire society. I am not now interested in analyzing this or in prescribing any remedies. I do wonder, however, whether the previous political measures pointed out as necessary to resolve the urban crises, which have already been adopted in many European countries, are likely to be introduced into the system of institutions of the American society. Every modification in the political course of actions and in institutions toward more democratic directions is likely to raise the reactions of conservative and moderate progressive groups, and this is clearly shown by referring to the history of American planning of the last fifty years.

Everybody knows that the way toward democracy is long and difficult. I want to suggest, anyway, the dimension of the forces that are in the future likely to oppose these radical innovations of the American urban perspective through an excerpt from Monthly Review which shows some of the problems involved:

"The big corporations and the national ruling class do not control the state and local governments. Most of what would be necessary to make serious improvements in the cities and to eliminate radical conflict and rebelliousness within the cities would have to be done at the metropolitan level. Those local property owners who do control the state and local governments, unlike the big corporations, have an enormous stake in the slums, and ghettos (as markets, high-yield real estate, sources of cheap labor for marginal businesses and domestic workers, etc.) and have absolutely no intention to sacrifice what are to them vital interests for the sake of creating an environment favorable to the operations of the big corporations and the national ruling class.

In these circumstances, urban development will continue to be governed by market forces and to generate conflicts - the current one over New York City's educational system is a good example.

The national ruling class is obviously extremely reluctant to meet this problem head-on, fearing that any wholesale attack on local vested interests (political as well as economic) would set off even more destructive and dangerous conflicts. So it temporizes, trying to bribe and cajole local power-holders through such devices as federal departments of urban affairs and transportation, Ford Foundations, university institutes of city planning, and the like. The results, as should be now obvious, have been, and will continue to be, minimal." 5

Sooner or later, it seems inevitable that more drastic measures will be tried: the problem itself is bound to get steadily worse. But, what these measures may be, is now impossible to foresee.

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